



UPDATE #24

July 15, 2015

FIRST, THE REALLY GOOD NEWS

There had been rumours for a month, but we chose not to report them. Wisely, as it turns out, as most were way off the mark.

On Saturday, July 11, Land Over Landings' chair, vice-chair, and communications head were among some 200 invited guests at the Pickering Recreation Complex for an announcement by the Prime Minister. Ajax-Pickering MP, Chris Alexander, in his introductory remarks, got right to the point: "We are here to mark a very important event. Forty-three years ago the Liberal government expropriated over 18,000 acres for an airport that was never built. It was a breach of trust – for land owners, for taxpayers, for the communities themselves." Indeed it was. The site and the people whose lives were severely disrupted, those who lived (and live) on and near the Lands, became victims of (or suffered collateral damage from) four decades of poor stewardship and neglect, during the tenures of many governments and of no fewer than 20 different Transport ministers.

The Prime Minister's words came with no caveats: "I'm delighted to announce that our Government will double our initial contribution by adding 5,200 more acres of land for inclusion in our Rouge National Urban Park!" Note: not "if re-elected," as subsequently reported by a major newspaper, but *right now*. According to Pam Veinotte, the Park's superintendent, all that remains to complete the transfer is the administrative work.

We're very aware that this wasn't the resolution some of the original families had hoped for; they wanted their land back, and who could blame them? But for a decade, Ottawa has seen public ownership as the only guarantee of farmland preservation; arguments for a land trust or conservation easements got nowhere. In the end, the farms will be permanently protected within a national park, far better than losing them to urban & industrial development as was threatened in 2013.

Following in POP's 1975 footsteps, we deemed champagne in order and drank our toast to the Lands in a beautiful corner of them during a perfect summer afternoon, surrounded by birdsong and verdant fields. The real import of this news – heck, let's call it what it is: this victory! – still hasn't sunk in. More than half the expropriated land is in safekeeping, and will serve a different but far more important public need than any airport would ever have done. Maybe, we thought (for a moment), we could kick back and enjoy summer before tackling the task of securing protection for the rest? No chance.

SO MANY THANKS IN ORDER!

We've had a huge win! That deserves applause and heartfelt thanks.

Many governments have come and gone since 1972 – and so have some 20 Transport Ministers! But we've been extremely fortunate since 2005 to have had two MPs, Mark Holland and Chris Alexander, who have worked with us, not against us, in pursuit of our goals. Transport Minister Lisa Raitt has met with us twice, and listened. And MP Matthew Kellway has been reading our petition into the House for over a year. We thank them all.

But mostly we thank our volunteers: everyone in LOL and our many sister organizations, for all they have done and for their unswerving belief in this cause. Group hug!

We could cynically ascribe this good news just to the coming election. It may partly be that, but not all. While working with people, you get to know them. And knowing how much the future of these Lands matters to all of you – and to us, and to them – is what has spurred our MPs to make our case in Ottawa.

We aren't naive. We know this week's victory was the easier one. Even in the 1972 airport plan the land now in the Park was buffer zone. Transport Canada admitted long ago that the area was extraneous to their needs.

As we head into the election, all of us must see to it that the never-ending threat to the remaining lands – those precious last acres – becomes an election issue. We've saved all the rest. Now let's save the last.

Farmland Forever, Airport Never!

NEXT, THE NAIL-BITING NEWS

You'll be hearing spin from various quarters that the Pickering airport is a certainty. But we were there at the July 13 meeting with the Transport Minister and *that is not what she said*. Or even implied.

She did say that on July 18, Transport Canada will publish new zoning regulations. These became necessary with the 2013 announcement of the first land transfer from airport site to new national urban park, and became doubly necessary with the second transfer. The public will have 60 days to provide written feedback. More on this soon.

At month's end, Transport Canada will be appointing an independent advisor (not from Ottawa; someone who knows the area) to:

- conduct market soundings
- consult with private and public interests, gauge views, look at economic development opportunities, look at the timing and the type of airport that *might* be needed
- report back within 12 months (earlier, if ready)

Meanwhile, Transport Canada will be assessing aviation needs across the Greater Golden Horseshoe. In the Minister's words, "there is a need to know if we have the air infrastructure we should have, *and whether there is a business case for a future airport.*" And "*no decisions* have been made on the timing or type of airport."

The Council Chambers at Durham Regional Headquarters were filled with representatives of the aviation industry and the local board of trade. At least one eager developer was there as well. Unforgivably, no Durham Region farmers were invited, despite their significant stake in this Durham issue and their huge contribution to the Region's (and the province's) GDP. Still, two York Region farmers were present (no farmers at all had been invited to last year's meetings). *Hello, government! Farming is business! Big business! The most important business of all!*

TIME TO GIRD LOINS

It could be just another consultation that goes nowhere, as has happened so often before – but we can't take that chance. While the government understandably wants to resolve this perpetual issue, Transport Canada and others are unwilling to take their eyes off that airport prize. What's in the way? Groups like Land Over Landings; the existence of all the under-utilized, subsidized airports in the GGH; the uncertain future of aviation, with no real alternatives to fossil-fuel-based jet fuel in sight; and the growing worldwide recognition that access to fresh water and enough food will be among this century's most pressing issues. *We must ensure that the decision made this time is the right one – for our region, for the future, for the common good.*

WHAT'S NEXT?

Plans are already forming around what we do next: who to talk to or meet with, who to get onside and partner with, what to undertake and in what order, what additional personnel and specific skills we'll need to counter this latest threat.

Meanwhile, you can greatly help by making sure your family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, and acquaintances are informed. *Share our newsletter. It tells the truth. Stay tuned !!*

ALERT !!

Mayor Ryan has posted a statement on FB that is NOT accurate. It reflects neither his own words at the meeting nor the Minister's (we transcribed the discussions in full). What is accurate is that Mayor Ryan and many business interests will continue to push for an airport on the Federal Lands, and will be submitting their arguments to the independent advisor conducting the study. Land Over Landings will commission our own study to make a Business Case for Agriculture on the Federal Lands and will be submitting our Case to the advisor.

If the Mayor is, in fact, privy to some information not revealed to the rest of us, then we should all be calling our MPs to ask for clarification. If an airport is a done deal and Mayor Ryan knows it, then we have all been misled and need to know the truth.

Land Over Landings Because food is a GROWING concern!

info@landoverlandings.com

landoverlanding@gmail.com

www.landoverlandings.com

905-649-2433

